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FAMILY AND SOCIAL LIFE OF THE NAMBIKWARA INDIANS

by

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INTRODUCTION

101 The name of the Nambikwara appears in ethnological literature from the eighteenth century on; but it seems useless here for us to [114] compile references reduced to a more or less distorted citation of the tribal name and to the approximate indication of the territory occupied by the group. In fact, with the exception of the name, which seems to be a surname of Tupi (1) origin, the Nambikwara remained

1. Cf. below, page 129, footnote 1.

practically unknown until the time of their discovery in 1907, by General (then Colonel) Candidio Mariano da Silva Rondon. From this date on, we are directly or indirectly indebted to the Rondon Commission for all the information available concerning them.

105 It is known that in 1907 Colonel Rondon was given a commission by the Brazilian government to explore the territories which extend approximately 1, 500 kilometers from the village of Diamantino to the Madeira River. This was to precede the construction of a strategic telegraph line connecting the federal capital with the frontier outposts of the northwest. In the course of a first expedition begun in 1907, Rondon succeeded in reaching the Juruena, principal source of the Tapajoz, unknown up to that time. This discovery took place the twentieth of October. A second expedition, begun in 1908, permitted the opening of a land route toward the Madeira. This was the first objective of the mission entrusted to General Rondon which 177 was realized on December 25, 1909. It was during these two expeditions that contact was established for the first time with the Nambikwara.

The laying of the telegraph line continued through the Indian territories from 1909 to about 1915. During this period and since, there have been regular, although intermittent, relations between the Indians and the members of the telegraph commission--construction

officers, soldiers /2/ and workmen. These contacts have continued since the completion of the work. They are always intermittent and are made especially by the stations whose service is assured by the Pareesi Indians educated in care of the Commission.

Leaving aside several books and articles of anecdotal character written by certain collaborators of General Rondon, we are limited to the following works as the only sources of information concerning the Nambikwara Indians. First, the Rapport ethnologique, by General Rondon himself, and printed in Rio de Janeiro as one of the numerous official publications of the Commission under No. 2, 1911. Next must be cited the lectures of the same author which followed the Roosevelt-Rondon expedition to the Rio da Duvida (Portuguese edition: Missão Rondon, Rio de Janeiro, 1916; English edition: Lectures delivered by General Candido Mariano da Silva Rondon, etc., Commissão Rondon, Publication No. 43). Recourse should also be made to an article by a young officer of the staff of General Rondon, Antonio Pyrineus de Souza ("Notas sobre os costumes dos Indios Nambikwaras," Revista do Museu Paulista, Vol. 12, 1920) and to the information scattered in the diverse reports of the Commission, published during and after the exploratory work, of which the most useful is doubtless that of Cartier (Rapport géologique et ethnologique, No. 23, Annexe 5). Some information will be found in the book of Theodore Roosevelt (Through the Brazilian Wilderness, Works, Vol. 6) and a short vocabulary in Max Schmidt ("Ergebnisse meiner zweijährigen Forschungreise in Matto Grosso," Zeitschrift für Ethnologie, Vol. 40, 1929).

In 1912, the Director of the National Museum of Rio de Janeiro, Dr. Edgar Roquette Pinto, was authorized to join the Rondon Commission in the field to receive, examine, and report to the Museum the ethnographic collections made since the beginning of the work. This trip must have given Dr. Roquette Pinto the occasion to write and publish several articles and a book. Certainly the most important of the former is his communication to the International Congress of Americanists held in London in 1912 (Os Indios Nambikwara do Brasil Central); then, his communication to the Pan-American Congress at Washington (1917) under the title, Os Indios da Serra do Norte. The book, Rondonia (last edition: Cia Editora Nacional, Sao-Paulo, 1935) is almost entirely dedicated to the Nambikwara and represents our best source of information.

For about seven
221 months these bands go wandering across the prairie in search of small
[220] game, small animals such as caterpillars, spiders, grasshoppers, rodents, snakes, lizards, and so forth, and fruits, grains, roots or wild honey--in short, all that might keep them from dying of hunger. Their camps, set up for one or several days, sometimes for several weeks, consist of as many temporary shelters as families, made of palms or branches stuck in a semi-circle in the sand and connected at the top. This is the period when the quest for food absorbs all activities. The women equip themselves with digging sticks and
221 411 184 the men hunt with the bow and arrow, of which several types must be distinguished. The eastern groups have a bow with a flat section which evolves toward a convex-plane section or a concave-convex section when one moves westward. As for the arrows, those made for hunting birds have a blunted tip. Arrows for fish have three to five points, each one formed like a minute harpoon, and the item is without barb. The poisoned arrows (1), whose tip is protected [15]

1. See below, p. 95.

by a sheath of bamboo, are reserved for hunting monkeys and small game. Those for large game have a long lanceolate point. The barb is attached or sewed on. Besides the bow and arrow, the men use a club
[189] which often takes the form of a javelin, and its use is reserved for magic and war operations (1).

1. Cf. below, p. 99.

824 The primary materials of the indigenous industry consist of varied
825 woods, wax from wild bees, resin, fibers of the buriti palm trees (Mauritia vinifera) and tucum (Astrocaryum tucuma) bone of the monkey, teeth and claws of mammals, fur (only to make ornaments), feathers, quills of porcupines, vegetable shells and river shells, stones,
412 cotton and grains. As implements they have knives made from a sharp piece of bamboo, from stones crudely fashioned, or from fragments of iron or steel obtained through exchange, and fixed with the aid of wax and cord between two pieces of wood forming the handle. Drills are made of a borer of stone or iron mounted at the end of a stick
[77] which they turn between their palms. The Rondon Commission expanded the use of axes and metal hammers, and the old stone axes serve now only as small anvil blocks for fashioning shell or bone.
[115] The use of stone polishers must also be mentioned and, among the objects of current usage, the spindles, combs, baskets and gourds to carry water.

601 184 Grandparents are most often singled out among themselves, and distinguished from the parents of the spouse, which does not happen in system a (1 or 2): also, the son (or daughter) of the brother (or the of the sister) of the father (or of the mother) are sometimes designated by different terms. The groups studied are not dense enough to be able to make a base for a theory of the system in force. Solutions of replacement intervene frequently, and the preferential forms of marriage found are not adequate for generalizations, due to an insufficient number of cases. But the preceding considerations suggest that preferential unions, choosing also among certain categories of cross-cousins, could formerly have been in force.

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Finally, the names for brothers (and sisters), elder and younger, are more changeable than in system a (1 or 2): and one sees appear a new term designating the brother or the sister of the other sex. This disorganization of vocabulary can be interpreted as resulting from the influence of the northern system (dialect c), where we shall see later on that it tends more and more to assimilate the system of groups b.

Here is the vocabulary of parentage used, with references to group a (1/2): [Note: m. s. = man speaking; w. s. = woman speaking; m. w. s. = man or woman speaking.]

Dialect a 1/2		Dialect b 1/2	
abuĩ'nosu	1.	(ta)mĩ'nde	(my) father, father's brother.
	2.	ĩnde	father (equals man).
	3.	usĩye	father (used to designate absent father, or father of a third person, or the father's brother.
	4.	(ta)mĩ'nlaore	father's brother (equals other father).
	5.	(ta)minddĩnere	father (father's brother when he substitutes for dead father).
aʒũnosu	6.	(ta)nãde	(my) mother, mother's sister.
	7-8.	(ta)nãdelaore, ndãore	mother (other mother; for the mother's sister and the mother of a third).

551 scrapes it to eat it. Brother! Scrape!"

551 The Indians feel very strongly the inconvenience of the system,
●177 especially when they are in contact with the whites. Those among them who intermittently frequent the posts of the Rondon Line have very rapidly adopted the Brazilian names which they hear pronounced around them, and they are—or have been—baptized Julio, José Maria, Luiza, Iracema, etc., giving these surnames some strange distortions. Sometimes too, there are nicknames like Lebre (lièvre = rabbit), Assucar (sucre = sugar) or Cavaignac (the shape of beard worn by the famous general). Several Indians have preserved this last name, thus perpetuating in the backwoods the memory of the time when Rondon lived and flourished.

We could use these names to designate them in the course of this study, or also their real names insofar as we have been able, in certain cases, to restore them. But these Brazilian names are only carried by the small minority of Indians who are in contact with the posts of the Rondon Line; [38] and the authentic names are lacking to us in a great number of cases. At any rate, the process would not be true to reality. For the remarkable point is that, in daily life, one does not hear a single name pronounced. It thus seems to us more in
128 conformance with the indigenous atmosphere to refrain, in the course
551 of this work, from using names to designate individuals, and we shall content ourselves with symbols indicating the sex, the group, and the place in the group of the individual considered (for each group, respectively A, B, C; capital letter for a man, small letter for a woman, followed by a figure identifying the subject.)

551 Nevertheless, as has just been indicated, it has been possible for
124 us, for group a1, to collect a complete list of names. This is how: one day when we were playing with a group of children, one of the little girls was struck by a playmate. She came immediately to take refuge near us, and began, in a very mysterious manner, to murmur something in our ears which we did not understand, and which we were obliged to have repeated for us several times, so that the adversary realized the trick, and, apparently furious, came in turn to reveal what appeared to be a solemn secret. After several hesitations and questions, the interpretation of the incident left no doubt. The first little girl had come, out of revenge, to give us the name of her enemy, and when the latter saw this, she told us the name of the other one, as a means of reprisal. From this moment on, it was very easy, if not very scrupulous, to arouse the children against one another, and to obtain from each of them the name of all the others. After this, a little complicity thus having been created, they gave us the

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Besides, they called the act of writing: iekaritukeditu (a1), that is "make lines," which for them had an esthetic interest:

(3) Kihikãgnare mãiene (b1).
It is nice to make lines.

•[177] The drawings reproduced in Figure 19 thus constitute a cultural innovation inspired by our own drawings.

622 confers; also [41] he asked us for a note pad and a pencil, and we
115 are likewise equipped when we travel together. He does not com-
157 municate to me verbally the information that I ask of him, but traces on his paper some wavy lines and presents them to me as though I should read his response. But he himself is half duped by his comedy. Each time that his hand finishes a line, he examines it anxiously, as if the significance should miraculously spring forth, and each time, the same chagrined disillusion is painted on his face. But he doesn't give in. And it is silently understood between us that his scrawl possesses a meaning which I pretend to understand. Naturally, the verbal commentary follows almost immediately, and excuses me from having to demand some very necessary clarifications. When we discuss command, we shall return to certain aspects of this semi-mystification.

He is a valuable informant who understands the problems, perceives the difficulties, and is interested in the work; but his functions absorb him often, and he disappears for whole days on a hunting expedition, a survey of itinerary or a localization of ripe seed or fruit trees. On the other hand, his wives often call him to tender love games in which he lets himself be voluntarily involved.

In a general way, his attitude shows a logic, a continuity of purpose, very exceptional among the Nambikwara who are often unstable and temperamental. Placed in other conditions and with other means at his disposal, he might be a valuable organizer. And he is, after all, alone responsible for the destinies of his group, which he conducts with competence, although in a sometimes utopian spirit.

The father and the mother of A1 are dead. But his father's brother and mother's sister, whom he calls ahuĩnosu and ãĩlenosu live in the same village (A65 and a66).

115 a2. --About 30 to 35 years. The eldest of the wives of A1, mother of a5, daughter of a18 and a now dead father. She is serious industrious, a little reserved in social relations. In the triple household

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621 comment later (1) on the complex motives that might have induced

1. Cf. p. 77.

[47] these two bands, speaking different dialects and who were not even capable of understanding one another without an interpreter, to practically merge. It seems that group b1 was composed of the rare survivors of a formerly important formation now disappeared, living previously in two distinct groups, around the sources of the eastern tributaries of the Roosevelt River. We have already tried to calculate these losses, resulting from recent epidemics (2). Group c had,

2. Cf. above, p. 6.--

[57] without doubt, gone through the same hardships. Moreover, its position had been compromised by antagonisms with other bands rising from the same dialect, and who had formerly been their allies. A visit, with a commercial goal, of related Indians originally from the south (members of the group known by the name of Kabixy) must have raised the forces of group b1 to 31 persons for
621 several days. Here is its composition at this moment:
115 Fire 1 (1 to 7). --The family of the chief of the band. The
157 chief, B1, is 30 to 35 years old, and one of the most intelligent
622 Indians whom it was our privilege to encounter. But he is intelligent
601 in a way very different from A1. The latter is prudent and very resourceful, always meditating some political combination. On the contrary, B1 is not a man of action, but rather contemplative, with a charming and poetic spirit, and rich sensibilities. He is fully conscious of the inevitable decadence of his people, and this conviction often shades his words with a subtle tint of melancholy:

(4) joɔ̃ndiɔ̃ɛ̃ : ɲãɔ̃naɲe hẽni niho ãɔ̃ndedɲiɛ̃n. (b1)

"I also did the same thing, now it is finished," [51] he says, remembering happier days when his group, far from being reduced to a handful of individuals incapable of keeping alive their traditional customs, was comprised of several hundreds of participants faithful to all the manifestations of the Nambikwara culture. His curiosity toward our customs and towards those which we had been able to observe in other tribes is just as great as ours. With him, ethnographic work is never unilateral. He conceives of it only as an exchange of information, and what we bring him is always very welcome. Often
[17] he even asks us for--and preserves carefully--drawings representing

621 feather ornaments, hair styles, arms, such as we have seen among
115 neighboring or faraway peoples. Did he entertain the hope of per-
157 fecting the material and intellectual equipment of his group thanks
622 to this information? It is possible, even though his dreamy tempera-
177 ment hardly ever drives him to realizations. However, one day when
601 we were interrogating him concerning the Pan pipes, to verify the
area of diffusion of that instrument, he answered that he had never
537 seen any, but that he would like to have a drawing (different from
group a, group b does not have real pipes of Pan, but instruments
made of two or three tubes of equal length and giving approximately
the same note, tied together with cotton thread and wax). With the
aid of our sketch he succeeded in making a crude but usable instru-
ment.

621 B1 had two wives: b2, about 25 years, mother of two little
601 girls of 5 to 7 years, b4 and b5; and b3, older than he (about 40
years old), mother of a boy of 7 years, B6, and of a girl of 9 years,
b7.

Fire 2 (8 and 9). --A son of a deceased brother of B1, whom the
latter then calls "son" (about 25 years old), and his wife about 18,
sister of B13; no information about the father and mother.

Fire 3 (10 to 12). --B10 is a brother of B8, and B1 calls him "son"
also. His wife, b11, of undetermined parentage, is about 20 years
old, and his daughter b12 about 6.

Fire 4 (13 and 14). --This household presents the only sure case of
oblique marriage in group b1. B13, about 25 years, married a girl
of 16 or 17, b14, daughter of a dead son of the dead brother of B1;
he calls her then, as seen before, tasuite.

Fire 5 (15 to 17). --These three individuals are the last survivors
of a related group destroyed by an epidemic. After the disaster,
they joined the band of B1. B15, about 35 years, is the brother of
b2, thus tarute of B1. His wife, the same age, b16, is a sister of B1,
thus ndedere of b2. Their son, B17, is about 5. The daughters of
B1 call him (B17) "husband," and he calls them "wives."

621 [52] The visitors. --They came from the region lying between
574 the sources of the tributaries of the left bank of the Juruena and of
601 those of the right bank of the Guaporé. All were related to their
hosts, and were distributed among three generations. The oldest was
comprised of three individuals: B18, about 50 years old, father of
B21, B25, B27, and B29; his wife b19, the same age, paternal aunt
of B1; and the brother of the wife, B20, 40 years. Besides the
children of B18 already mentioned (from 20 to 30 years old), the next

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Fig. 19
Left: a man; center: a monkey; right: sketch made by Al while explaining his genealogy (c. p. 40, fn. 1).

The fact is that purely comical and sometimes childish appearances sometimes cover attitudes which, without being contradictory to the preceding, are nevertheless very different. The history of the eastern group, in the course of [124] these last years, is very significant in this regard. From 1909 to 1920, the installation of the telegraph line was marked by periodical conflicts alternating with cordial contacts, but in 1925, seven workers of the line were invited to visit (for the first time) the villages of the right bank of the Juruena River where we went later in 1938, and they disappeared there. From this time on, the contacts of the eastern group with the posts of the Rondon Line were interrupted, but in 1933 a Protestant mission was installed not far from the post on the Juruena. It seems that from the beginning relationships were quite strained, the Indians not being satisfied with the presents, very insufficient, they say, by which the missionaries paid for their help in the construction of the house and the planting of the garden. Whatever the case may have been, in 1933 a feverish Indian presented himself at the mission, and publicly received two capsules of "Cafiaspirin" which he took, after which he went to take a bath in the river, had a congestion and died. Through expert practitioners, the Nambikwara concluded that he

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had been poisoned. An attack of reprisal was carefully prepared and took place, in the course of which A1 and A5 distinguished themselves. The six persons composing the mission were killed by beating or pierced with arrows, including a baby of two. Only one woman was found alive by an expedition sent to aid them from Cuiabá. The version which she gave of the events coincides exactly with that which we collected from the main protagonists of the other camp.

Poison was still to play a role in the life of A6, and this during our stay. We found ourselves visiting (August 1938) at the camp of a neighboring group (n2), and relationships became quickly strained between A6 and our hosts, undoubtedly over the question of women, so that he got the habit of coming to my camp to seek a more friendly atmosphere, at the same time that he shared my food. This fact was noticed, a delegation of four men came to find me one day, and in quite a menacing tone of voice told me to mix some poison (which they brought me along) in the next dish which I would offer to A6; they thought it advisable and indispensable to do away with him at once, for, they told me, he is "very wicked" (kakore) and "is worth nothing" (ajokiene). I had the greatest difficulty in getting rid of my visitors without opposing them with a refusal which in turn would have exposed me to animosity which I had just learned it was better to avoid, and I considered my best plan of action to exaggerate my ignorance of the language, and to feign obstinate lack of comprehension. After several attempts, my visitors retired very disappointed. I warned A6 who immediately disappeared. I was to see him again only four months later.

These incidents are characteristic of Nambikwara psychology. The Nambikwara are very open, confident and spontaneous, but they are very sensitive and react with great violence to deception [125] or disappointment. Few primitives are as easily accessible. Few give as free access to their intimate lives, to their beliefs, daily acts, thoughts and sentiments. But despite this facility and cordiality, the visitor, be he an ethnographer or a member of a neighboring tribe—must constantly be on guard and watch his actions; for the slightest imprudence, the least clumsiness, may incite reactions difficult to evaluate among his hosts, and in connection with which recent events are always present to recall that they may be extreme. A6 offered a perfect example of this confidence and spontaneity, allied with brusk manifestations of violence and irritability.

Thus, the Nambikwara character alternately presents two aspects, or more exactly, testifies to a double nature: one which we shall call positive, and which goes much farther in this sense than among many Indians in contact for centuries with the whites; and the other, of metaphysical nature, whose rigor and exaltation at times evoke the mysticism of the North

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American Indians. As example of the first aspect we shall mention: the public and "scientific" preparation of the curare; the development of certain therapeutics such as the treatment of ophthalmia by instillation; the flexibility of the sexual division of labor; sexual life in general; the atmosphere of the rites of abstinence; the rational attitude as regards alimentary taboos. Several remarks on this point will make clear the indigenous psychology. The white worms (anambu, a1) which are frequently found in the nuts of the bacaiuva palm have been indicated as being inedible. Subsequently we verified that they were eaten in secret by the children. Thus a8 finds them while cracking nuts and gives them to her little sister a9; and furtively the too eats a worm. Her action is noticed by a3 and a4 who cover her with sarcasm. However one day when food is scarce, A1 eats a plate of worms which his young wife a4 has gathered for him, and sadly remarks that, due to lack of meat, he is reduced to this poor fare. The same observation is made about the hawk. Above we showed what constitutes the metaphysical basis of the alimentary taboo concerning the jaguar. However, the current interpretation is entirely different:

66. xiatedeinã? xũi?e (b1).
I don't eat any of it. It smells bad!

In the face of new situations, the Indians generally react without mysticism. Thus, A1 before the problem of writing: (1) on the other hand,

1. P. 40 f. and p. 89.

the Nambikwara show total indifference toward photography, even when they have understood its purpose. We have never found [126] Indians who tolerated the participation of the camera in the slightest details of their intimate life with such complete indifference.

However, the passage to irrational positions is made with the same brusqueness which characterizes the two attitudes, almost simultaneous, of an infant hilarity before the still unusual sight of an inflated balloon which burns, and of an appeal to evil magic when a second balloon succeeded in rising. (1) Never does the tender indulgence with which the men surround

1. P. 97.

their companions (2) allow one to suspect the actual metaphysical curse

2. P. 86 f.

with which the women are burdened in the Nambikwara culture, excluded under pain of death from collective ceremonies, deaf and blind to the voice

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When rains come, the *Nambicuara* settle in temporary villages, and the men open circular gardens in the gallery forest by burning and felling the trees with stone (now steel) axes. They till the soil with pointed sticks and raise both bitter and sweet manioc, several kinds of maize which are different from those of their more civilized neighbors (Roquette-Pinto, 1938, p. 297 n.), beans, gourds, cotton, urucú, and a variety of small tobacco with tiny leaves. Despite the difficulty of fishing in the deep, clear tributaries of the Juruena River, they have moderate success using fish arrows, basket traps, and a drug made of a vine.

Food preparation.—Game is usually only half cooked in hot ashes, but it is sometimes smoked on rectangular or pyramidal balsacuta. Manioc is grated on thorns of the cutiuí palm (*Iriartea* sp.) imbedded in palm wood planks. To remove the poisonous juice of bitter manioc, the pulp is either squeezed in a strip of bark twisted spirally or buried for several days to allow the juice to drain off. Balls of the pulp are then sun-dried and packed in leaves in baskets or buried at marked places. In times of scarcity, perhaps months later, the half-rotten balls are made into flat cakes, hastily cooked in hot ashes, and eaten.

The *Nambicuara* cannot bear to eat salt, which they do not know how to prepare, or pepper, which they do not cultivate. Even hot food is cooled with water before it is eaten. Wild honey, too, is diluted with water. The only condiment is a variety of cumaré bean which has a strong, bitter almond taste. It is boiled in pots; afterward the liquid is drunk and the beans are mixed with food, especially with grasshoppers crushed in mortars. Armadillo meat is often ground with maize flour.

Domestic animals and pets.—The *Nambicuara* have many pets, especially monkeys, coatis, parrots, and birds. Domesticated animals were unknown until the Rondón Commission introduced chickens and dogs. Although at first extremely afraid of dogs, the Indians quickly adopted them and treated them with the same deep affection they show all their tame animals. Even now they are terrified by oxen seen at telegraph stations, and call them by the name given to the deadly spirits of the water and the bush. They do, however, hunt and eat horses and mules as if they were wild game.

HOUSES

The surprising variety of house types suggests recent borrowing from neighboring tribes. The *Nambicuara*, like the *Siriono*, may formerly have lacked houses entirely. During most of the year, even at the present time, they build only scanty temporary shelters for a single night. These consist of branches of palms stuck into holes dug in the sand to form a half or quarter circle on the side from which the sun, the wind, or rain are expected (pl. 37, *center, left*). Each individual family builds its own

The Wak[illegible] [illegible] do not
323 make pottery, but they sometimes acquire pots from the Parecsi in exchange for game or fish.

HUNTING, FISHING, AND COLLECTING

621 Today, at least, the Waikisu band is a producing and consuming unit. Whatever a man or his family gathers is shared among the band. This, however, does not mean that the whole band goes out every day or that they keep together while out hunting, fishing, and collecting. Except 584 when the men go hunting such large game as the jaguar, tapir, and peccary, the acquisitive unit is the family. Every morning while Julio's band was camped in Utiarity a family or two could be seen going out, the husband walking in front armed with bow and arrows, the wife following [182 and carrying a burden basket on her back and a baby strapped on her hip, an older child following 459 her. As they move slowly along they collect 222 fruits, nuts, insects, snakes, ants, lizards, rats, wild honey, and a great variety of grubs or larvae. 226 When they come to a pond they wade around with small baskets in their hands and scoop out small fish. On one of these trips I observed them catching fish that were only 2 inches in length. [252 These were later thrown on hot coals and eaten 262] without being cleaned. Small birds no larger 223 than a sparrow are shot if the man can get near 222 enough to use his bow and arrow. If they come [347] to a burití stalk of the right size they will cut it down, put it into the burden basket, and take it 313 to camp. On their way home they will usually pick up dry firewood. Thus, when a family returns at nightfall the basket will be full of a wide assortment of foods and useful materials.

224 Monkeys, deer, and large birds are generally [177] stalked by a single hunter, particularly if he has a gun. Julio and Marciano each owned a shotgun and quite often hunted alone. If a man goes out in the morning and runs onto a group of peccaries he will hurry back to camp, and all the men will then go to where the peccaries are feeding. When they hear the peccaries the hunters will form into three files, one heading directly toward the pigs, the other two flanking the game on each side. When near enough the middle file stops and spreads out, the other two files then slowly surround the pigs. As the flanking movement is going on the pigs sometimes move, but the middle group of hunters maintains contact

Kingi, the Nambicuara tinkl fishing appears very elementary. The small fish are wrapped in leaves and placed in hot ashes until cooked. Large fish are broiled on a halmount. The Nambicuara also claim that they fish at night with torches along the river banks. This method may have been taken over from the Brazilians.

AGRICULTURE

The principal food crops grown by the Nambicuara are bitter manioc, sweetpotatoes, arrowroot, corn, maize, beans, and peanuts. To this list we must add such nonfood crops as cotton, tobacco, urucú, and gourds. The scientific and native names of these plants are listed in Appendix 1.[1] In more recent times they are known to produce sweet manioc and sugarcane. The dependence upon food crops in relation to game, fish, and wild food plants is difficult to gage. The statements of missionaries, however, appear to indicate that cultivated crops do not provide a year-round food supply and may actually play a minor role as compared with dependence upon noncultivated resources.

Farming is done on the slopes of the "galeria" forests, where, as we have seen, they also do most of their hunting and collecting. The Wakitáiu band clears and cultivates a single field and, as we have said, lives in a single house while thus occupied. In the past the field (kaíbu) was cleared with a stone ax (stóru) and a wooden club (kabutéiru). Today steel axes and machetes are used, but the method of planting is still the same. The efficiency of steel tools over stone axes and wooden clubs is indicated by the statement that in the past when a new field had to be cleared the people had to work during most of the wet season in order to fell the trees, a task which they now perform in May and June.

Formerly the light undergrowth was pulled out by hand and the bushes and saplings were beaten down with the wooden club. The Nambicuara had a unique way of felling trees. Starting near the bottom of the slope, they cut all the small trees part way through, then selected a number of large trees as kingpins. When these large trees were felled they knocked down the smaller trees below them. This was continued until they had a circular clearing of the required size on the slope. Today the clearing is done with axes and knives,

[1] [Cal. 116, pp. 121-126.—Eds.]

252 The Nambicuara method of processing manioc in comparison with that of the Canayurá is simple and crude. The following describes the method used today: Marciano's wife dug up a burden basket full of manioc from a field belonging to the Protestant Mission. She sat under a tree and peeled the tubers with an old butcher knife (formerly a piece of bamboo was used). She washed the peeled tubers and placed them in a calabash. She then took a grater made from a piece of kerosene box about 2 feet long and 6 inches wide to which an 18-inch strip of perforated tin was nailed. She placed one end of the grater in a larger copper basin (belonging to the mission) while the other end rested on the edge, and while steadying the grater with one hand she grated the tuber with the other. The tubers did not stand in water nor were they dipped in water during the process of grating.

[171]

After the tubers were grated she dipped out a calabash full of mash and began pressing it with her hands and pouring the juice into another calabash. After she had drained off as much juice as possible she picked up a handful of mash (*wiiwaru*) and rolled it and squeezed it until no more juice could be expelled. This ball she placed in another calabash and continued making balls until the calabash was full. She then patted down the balls to form a round loaf about 10 inches in diameter and 4 inches thick, which she set out on the bare ground to dry in the sun. After several days in the sun these loaves got hard and dry and form the storable product (*kinakáingare*) from which the edible cake *hi'inirv* (also called *wailáwa*) is baked. The juice (*oyáwa*) which was left in the calabash she poured into a slight depression in the ground, and after the liquid had drained off she collected the thin film of starch flour (*akuinirv*) along with some sand, rolled it into a ball, and placed it in hot ashes to bake. The lack of pottery vessels prevents the Nambicuara from saving and boiling the juice. They know, however, that the juice is valuable, and when they have cooking vessels they boil it to form a thick porridge.

[251]

[415]

When the Nambicuara wish to prepare a greater quantity of pulp they use a piece of bast for a press. This is a piece of embira bark about 3 feet long and 8 inches wide called *sáru*. A woman rolls a ball of pulp in the strip of bark and twists the bark until the pulp is dry. The balls are then

[p. 91(2)]

412 415 in her burden basket, whereas the modern axe, knives, and other tools, along with his ornaments, the man carries in a similar basket, or he straps this basket on the back of a boy while he walks in front of the file carrying his bow and arrows or gun ready to shoot whatever game is met along [264] the way. Whenever they kill some animal or catch a few fish and feel hungry they stop and prepare a meal. During the dry season they are at home anywhere in their land territory, moving only when hunger spurs them on.

411 412 ●177 Today, of course, the Nambicuara have steel axes and knives. The heavy equipment of the Wakitênio band in 1948, consisted of three axes, two shotguns, and some half dozen bows which were hidden near their permanent house. Each man had a butcher knife, but all men did not have bows and arrows. There did not appear to be any desire on the part of each man to possess these implements. So long as the band had a few of these objects everyone seemed to be satisfied. Cassimão, a widower when he arrived in Utiarity, did not possess a bow and arrow, nor a gun, nor an ax. By working for the Protestant missionaries he acquired an ax and when Marciano died he inherited his bow and arrows. After a [#31] few days, however, he had given the bow and arrows to a Brazilian in exchange for a felt hat.

412 Examining the hand tools which Julio used, the following articles were found: A chisel (kwatiru) made by inserting a piece of steel into a wooden handle wound with twine; a small bamboo [306] knife (sikikwirikuta); a hardwood drill (kôkuta), used with sand for perforating tucum nut shells in making beads; a piece of sandstone (dôkipiru), used as a whetstone; a number of rough leaves of the lixeira tree (kôr'ôsuta), used as sandpaper; and a 415 comb (ka'dôsta). Each of Julio's three wives had a burden basket, a small square basket, and two or three gourd vessels of various sizes. A single wooden mortar and pestle did service for the whole band.

411 One of the most important implements of the Nambicuara is the bow, kôkiru, made from the piuva (jacaranda-copaia) or the sirva palm (*Syagrus species*). By far the most common is the bow made from piuva, ranging between 6 and 7 feet in length, flat on the inside and convex on the outside. One of the bows examined measured 2 meters and 14 cm. in length, 4 cm. in width, and 1.5 cm. in

283 breaks down. After one-half hour the starchy material is washed out and the ribbons begin to separate into fine strands of fiber. The bunch is then shaken out and hung up to dry. When of good quality, that is, when the reed is of the right age, the fibers dry out a pale cream color. While the man is occupied at this task the girls make temporary necklaces from the green outer skin and the boys use the thin central stems as arrows for their small bows. These dried-out bunches are [30] a favorite decoration of the Nambicuara when painted with horizontal bands of urucú. They can then be suspended from the neck and allowed to hang down the back, or pieces are attached to the arm bands, leg bands, and in front to the belt.

Cotton twine is used for making arrows, stringing beads, weaving arm bands and the narrow shoulder straps which women use for carrying young children. From the cotton bunch (*kóndee*) the woman picks the bolls (*kóndéiee*) to make cotton twine (*kóndéiee*). As the making of burití twine is a man's task, so the making of cotton twine is purely a woman's task. After picking the seeds from the bolls she spreads the cotton into flat disks and then into circles. Next she breaks the circles and joins them to form a long rope about an inch in diameter. This rope she winds around her arm, twists the end of it with her fingers, and fastens it to the top of a spindle (*wenkéiee*). With a twirl of her fingers she sets it spinning and lets it drop, plucking out the cotton as it is spun. Later she unties the string and fastens it near the wheel and then by spinning the spindle on the ground the twine is wrapped around it. This process is repeated until the cotton rope is used up.

286 The men do the weaving on a true but very makeshift loom. Two forked sticks, roughly a yard long, are thrust into the ground about 2 feet apart and at an angle. One cross bar rests in the forks while another is fastened on near the ground. The warp is wound around these cross bars. The heddle, shuttle, and sword are used in [77] weaving the narrow material. It seems very likely that this type of loom was taken over from the Arawakan Paressí.

The bast strap or band (*se'en*) is made from embira and is used for pressing manioc pulp, for carrying children or baskets, and, when cut into strips, is used for tying up bundles.

[p. 95 (A)]

4: Oberg E-5 (1949) 1953 EP17 Nambikwara SP17

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[17]

[p. 136 (17)]

6: Levi-Strauss E-5 (1938-1939) 1943
SP17 Nambicuara SP17

THE SOCIAL USE OF KINSHIP TERMS AMONG BRAZILIAN INDIANS

By CLAUDE LEVI STRAUSS

121 607 THE kinship system of the Nambikuara Indians of the Western Matto Grosso is one of the most simple in Brazil. At the same time it is typical of a sociological pattern, cross cousin marriage, which according to our present information seems to have been very common throughout South America. The object of this article is to compare the familial organization of the Nambikuara with that of other tribes described in the older literature and to show that a certain kinship tie, the brother-in-law relationship, once possessed a meaning among many South American tribes far transcending a simple expression of relationship. This significance, still observable in Nambikuara culture, is both sexual and politico-social; and, owing to its complexity, the brother-in-law relationship may perhaps be regarded as an actual institution. Since the sixteenth century travellers and sociologists have failed to devote sufficient attention to the phenomenon, probably because it could readily be interpreted as a development of the imported Iberian *compadre* relationship. In our opinion, on the contrary, the brother-in-law relationship, together with its remarkable implications, constitutes an indigenous aboriginal institution based on the pattern of native culture. Nevertheless, it presents a striking example of convergence in which the native and Latin-Mediterranean institutions show numerous apparent similarities overlying important structural differences.

131 133 The Nambikuara Indians are settled on the upper courses of the feeders of the Tapajoz River, between the eleventh and the fifteenth parallels. Their territory consists of a semi-desert savanna, which contrasts with the narrow gallery forests along the main waterways. The fertile soil of these forests allows [511] the natives to cultivate a few gardens in the rainy season, but during most of the year the Nambikuara subsist mainly by hunting and gathering wild food. 177 Compared to the majority of Brazilian tribes, their cultural level is low. As they were discovered only in 1907 and as they had practically no contact with white civilisation between the year of the Rondon-Roosevelt Expedition in 1914 and the time of our own field work in 1938–39, their familial and social organization may be considered still intact.

601 The Nambikuara kinship system may be summarized as follows: All the father's brothers are classified together with the father and are called "father," and all the mother's sisters are classified with the mother and are called "mother." The father's sisters and the mother's brothers are classified together with the spouse's parents and the parents' parents in a single category which denotes simultaneously the cross aunts and cross uncles, the mother-in-law and father-in-law, and the grandparents. Passing to Ego's generation, the parallel cousins, both the children of the father's brothers and of the mother's sisters, are merged with siblings and are called "brother" and "sister," Turn-

261 which they covered themselves, squatting in a circle beneath the leaves and singing all the while. After a long time they rose, and with the branches still tied to their backs they started dancing around their catch, which was later carved.

115 Unhappily, Gouveia was of an amazing inadequacy. He had lived among them, a captive, for six months; he had actually married an Indian woman, who had tried her best to teach him the language of her forefathers. Yet in the end he fled, bringing back only the vaguest sort of information such as the above, which nevertheless I have deemed proper to record here.

276 Of the stimulants customarily used by primitive peoples, tobacco is the most important [among the Nambicuara] aside from those alcoholic beverages which have already been mentioned.

I have stated earlier that they dry the leaves between two pieces of wood which they stick into the house thatch; when they wish to smoke, they take a leaf and crumble it between their fingers, rolling up the dust in another leaf plucked from a tree which the Cocozu call enandzũ.

[238] They also keep tobacco by reducing the leaves to dust which they store in special gourds.

[Fig. 28]

[177] Prior to the arrival of the Rondon Commission, the pipe was unknown among the people of the Serra do Norte. Even today they do not like it and prefer their cigarettes, which are small and quite unlike the huge rolls of some Amazon tribes. [Fig. 30]

Their tobacco (Nicotiana tabacum) is mild and pleasantly scented. On journeys they always carry gourds filled with tobacco dust, or sticks with tobacco leaves; if they feel like smoking somewhere along the way, they stop and form a circle. They proceed as if they were about to have a meal and kindle a small fire. When the cigarettes are finished they continue on their way.

They are extremely fond of our roll tobacco, especially when made into cigarettes with pieces of newspaper...

291 The Indians of the Serra do Norte go naked. Both men and
184 women wear a straw cord around the hips. The Cocozu wear bands of embira around the wrists and upper arms, below the knees and

301 [280] [One necklace not mentioned earlier] is made with the [824] seeds of a Cyperacea (tanieikerê) which the Suya of the Xingu River also use. . . . .

[825 237] Oradaikruzê is a beautiful bracelet made with the tail rings of the giant armadillo (Dasypus gigas). It looks like ivory. Other bracelets are made from the nuts of the babassu and pindova (Orbignya speciosa) [824] palms.

[Fig. 65]

Bands for the upper arm are made of cotton and fastened similarly to those of the Paressi.

291 The jalaçu is a simple fiber cape, widely used, which fastens to the neck and hangs down the back. There is also a black feather cape in the collection.

301 [281] The stem of the unetizú (nose plume) is made of thin bamboo or the stalk of a tough grass (Andropogon).

. . . . The helmets of puma or jaguar hide are used in that region only by the Nambicuara and by the Cayabi of the Paratininga.

[Fig. 66]

285 Max Schmidt broadly classified Brazilian Indian plaiting into Palmblattflechterei (palm-leaf plaiting) and Doppelfadengeflechte (double-strand plaiting). But he also admitted the existence of a third type, where two elements running in different directions are crossed by a third. This type occurs frequently on the Xingu River . . . and is found in Nambicuara baskets (atiçú).

[282: page of figures]

[283] As plaiting material the Nambicuara use titara lianas and sometimes bamboo.

[293] . . . . Nambicuara fans, made with bacaba leaves, . . . are of pentagonal shape . . . .

534 A kind of nose flute made of gourd discs (hait-teataçú) seems ● [177] to have been borrowed from the Paressi.

[Fig. 67]

The double flutes were borrowed from the Tapajoz tribes (Mundurucu, Maue, etc.). [See fig. . . .(70, p.]

177 [Fig., p. 60A]

[284] Some items in the collection are of special inerest because they document the process of material acculturation. They consist on the one hand of objects that incorporate iron found by accident in the tracks of [Fig. 20] hunters and rubber gatherers; and on the other hand of imitative artifacts, made with the unskilled hand of a primitive people desirous of copying the products of a more advanced industry and the forms of a superior art.

[285: full page of figures.]

[286][Fig. 21] An instance of such imitation is provided by several diadems which crudely attempt to copy similar ornaments found among the Nambicuara; the latter are obviously alien objecs plundered from northern tribes, where featherwork has reached a higher development.

[Fig. 68]

They have learned to appreciate the advantages of our hats [287] and prize them highly. An unhappy Indian who had not received one as a gift attempted to make one for his own pleasure, plaiting and adjusting bacaba leaflets...

Chapter XI

Conclusions

174 [307] It is not possible at this time to attempt a definitive synthesis of Nambicuara ethnography in relation to other tribes.

If we could distinguish in Brazil the two classical periods (Paleolithic and Neolithic), the Serra do Norte Indians would be included in the former; their axes are crudely chipped and their culture resembles the characteristic Paleolithic pattern. (1)

1. Diagramatically and in relation to their neighbors, the Nambicuara recall the Paleolithic peoples; but their culture, with its rudiments of agriculture and weaving and its crude

7:Roquette-Pinto--60C E-4, 5 (no date)1938 SP17 Nambicuara SP17
(ca. 1912)

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Fig. 68. Imitation of a straw hat made by a Juruena River Indian.

174

but smooth-edged axes, is more akin to the proto-Neolithic or transitional period. The present trend is to recognize in the New World Paleolithic industries . . . but no formal overlapping periods as in Europe. (R. L.)

A later footnote by Heloisa Alberto-Torres which is not reproduced here contains the following statement: ". . . an interesting ethnographic relationship is [established by] the absolute identity of Australian and Nambicuara axes . . ." (Ed.)

At first observation, the Nambicuara might seem to be an old and backward branch of the Paressi tribe.

[308] What we know of the physical anthropology, ethnography and linguistics of both groups, however, invalidates this supposition.

177 Yet their culture bears unmistakable signs of Paressi influence.
[302] The first is the beehive-shaped house, formerly built by the Paressi. This is an import among the Nambicuara; the original house of the Serra do Norte Indians is the screen of leaves and branches, similar to the kijême of the Botocudo (Windschirm of the German ethnologists) and reminiscent of the North American wigwam.

[Fig., p. 61A]

[309] And if they did not borrow the large "round house" from the Paressi, they adopted it from Bolivian Indians.

[303] Another instance of alien influence is the nose plume, which the Paressi do not wear now but which formerly, according to Antonio
177 Pires, they could not do without; and also the nose flute, which
534 [the Nambicuara] play unskilfully, as though it were a little-known instrument of yet unfathomed secrets.

The double flute seems to have been brought from the north. It must be an import from the Maue and Munducuru, with whom the Serra do Norte Indians have had serious clashes as already mentioned above.

[Fig. 70]

177 Their plaiting follows patterns clearly characteristic of the [285] Xingu (Trumai and Nahuqua) and gives proof of contact with those backward tribes which the rudimentary culture of the Nambicuara had already implied.

[53] The quadrangular barbecue, which differs from the usual pattern, is used only by the more advanced groups (Tagnani, etc.); it recalls the barbecue of the Javahe as depicted by Fritz Krause. (1)

1. F. Krause, In Den Wildnissen Brasiliens [In the Brazilian Wilderness] (Leipzig, 1911).

[301] The straw ornaments of the Nambicuara are quite similar to 197 those of the Suya. But linguistic affinities are even more indicative of contact between the two groups. No other people speaks a dialect [310] so similar to that of the Nambicuara in terms of word morphology, although the two languages are otherwise quite different.

171 It is interesting that a spontaneous affinity should arise be- 177 tween two remote and equally primitive tribes, the Guayaki of Paraguay and the Nambicuara of the Serra do Norte, from their common use of the jaguar hide helmet.

However, I am inclined to believe that the latter copied it from their neighbors, the Cayabi of the Parataninga River, who use helmets of the same material.

174 Unfamiliarity with the banana tree and with the pipe (an ob- 171 ject frequently encountered in North American mounds and Brazilian sambaquis) indicates how long the Nambicuara have been established in their mountain range.

Recognition of the Ge-Botocudo group as one of the oldest representatives of aboriginal South American populations is no longer a matter of dispute. . . . .

171 [311] There is no doubt, in my opinion, that the [Brazilian] linguistic groupings correspond to ascending stages of civilication [312]. . . . . The Serra do Norte is inhabited by a people of Ge culture evolving toward the Nu-Arawakan culture, of which they have barely reached the initial stages.

/215 cont./

278 threatens to overflow it is removed from the fire for a second and then put back to boil. A thick, reddish scum forms which [413] holds the largest impurities; it is removed as it appears with a straw from a palm tree (Pl. V, A). After five to ten minutes on an average the boiling diminishes; the liquid turns brown and begins to thicken. It is then taken from the fire and [415] poured with the aid of a funnel (kǫ̃li) made from a rolled leaf into a new receptacle to be concentrated (Pl. IV, C).

[415] [177] Concentration. The concentration is done in a receptacle (here, a tin can from the mission) suspended 40 or 50 centimeters above a small fire, into which successive portions of liquid are added as they are prepared. The concentration takes two to three hours. According to its degree /of concentration/ they obtain a thick blackish-brown liquid, reddish when looked through, ready to be applied to the arrows with a straw, or a black paste which becomes very hard on cooling and can be kept for a long time. Before being used this paste must be softened at low heat.

The Çabanè recommend that one not touch the curare with the fingers nor even breathe the steam from it during the boiling. This hypothetical toxicity of the steam had already been noted by former travelers; it was even asserted that these emanations were so dangerous that the Indians had the curare prepared by old women who almost always succumbed to it. One can see (Pl. V, A) that the Çabanè sorcerer is not afraid of it.

Curare does not enter healthy skin, and the Ñambikwara of the Juruena press the water-soaked bark between their hands, taking the sole precaution of washing immediately afterward. The steam that I voluntarily inhaled never caused me the least sickness.

[192] The Çabanè call curare and the plant which produces it irĩwa, and the still unconcentrated liquid from soaking iriwiya. The Tagnani name the plant and the curare naĩdę̃.

/220 cont./

278 171 [177] The Tamandé Ñambikwara, of the upper course of the Roosevelt River, assured me that curare had come to them from other Indians living farther to the north, in the region of the Gy Paraná /Gi-Paraná River/; it was not possible to make them specify what kind of Indians these were.

The Cabixiano /Cabishi?/ of the Rio Mequem, to the northeast of Ñambikwara territory, also use curare. According to a civilized Indian of this group encountered at the post of Baron de Melgaço, their product with a complex vegetable base is prepared secretly and only by a few old men; it is a hard curare in a jar. It is used for hunting, even of tapirs, and for war.

The Pareci, along with the Ñambikwara, represent the extreme southern point of the spread of curare, the use of which as one goes toward the Amazon becomes more and more frequent and its preparation surrounded with more mystery.

278 137 All the curares are not as simple as the Ñambikwara curare, but all appear to have as their principal base a species of Strychnos which varies according to the region. Certain Strychnos such as St. toxifera Benth., Str. lethalis Barb. Rod., and especially St. crevauxhiana Baill, are particularly toxic; others like St. pseudo-quina are very low in poisonous elements.

278 Besides the Strychnos, active elements of curare, of numerous other plants generally poisonous but with very diverse properties, and of animal substances such as venoms, often enter into the composition of this poison. Their addition answers different ends.

Sometimes these are resins or gums whose sole utility is to harden the product and to assure its preservation.

Sometimes they are toxic substances destined to reinforce or to complete the action of the Strychnos.

/221/ In other cases other substances without any actual effect but with magical properties are added to curare. Their nature is infinitely variable.